MEDIEVAL CHURCH AND SOCIETY

Collected Essays

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Approaches to Medieval Forgery[1]

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THERE is a famous passage in Lord Acton's paper on 'German schools of history' in which he claimed that '. . . a crust of designing fiction covers the truth in every region of European history. The most curious of the twenty-two thousand letters in the correspondence of Napoleon, that of 28th March 1808, on his

Spanish policy, . . . proves to be a forgery, and the forger is Napoleon. Whole volumes of spurious letters of Joseph II, Marie Antoinette, and Ganganelli are still circulated. Prince Eugene should be well known to us through his autobiography, the collection of six hundred of his letters, and the *Life* by Kausler. But the letters are forged, the *Life* is founded upon them, and the autobiography is by the Prince de Ligne. The letter from the Pruth, which deceived the ablest of the historians of Peter the Great, is as fabulous as his political testament. So too are . . . the life of [Columbus] by his son, one of the trials of Savonarola, Daru's acts of the Venetian inquisitors, the most famous of the early Italian chronicles, the most famous of the early privileges and charters of almost every European country'.[2] And so the catalogue goes on. In practice, however, for most historians, dodging the forger is an occasional exciting hazard, not a normal part of his daily routine, though there are some exceptions: the archaeologist who deals with the artefacts of certain parts of the world, and the numismatist who deals in ancient or medieval coins from whatever source, have constantly to be on the lookout.

One of the few areas where the crust of designing fiction over the literary sources is so thick that the historian must always consider the possibility of forgery is the period stretching from Pseudo-Isidore in the mid ninth century to Geoffrey of Monmouth and the Westminster forgers in the mid twelfth; forgery then was an entirely respectable activity. I do not mean that it was no crime: this is a point on which there has been some misunderstanding, and it is best cleared up at the outset. Amid the Christmas festivities of 1125, when the Westminster forgers were in the prime of life, all the moneyers of England were gathered by the Bishop of Salisbury and mutilated, because a number of them had en-

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[1] This paper is concerned with documents, and only touches e.g. relics incidentally. Strictly perhaps the word forgery should only be used of imitations of genuine documents made with fraudulent intent; but one purpose of this survey, which is inevitably both general and highly selective in its treatment, is to plot the ambiguous territory between documents which are in a full sense authentic instruments of the authority which produced them and those which are wholly bogus, and also the ambiguities surrounding the intention of the men who produced inauthentic documents or altered genuine ones. A particularly striking example of both these difficulties is the Anglo-Saxon diploma: see Dr Chaplais's articles cited below, n. 32. Hence no precise definition of forgery is attempted in the text.

[2] *Historical Essays and Studies* (London, 1907), pp. 363–4 (this paper was first published in 1886). I was first introduced to this passage, more than twenty years ago, by an unpublished paper by Prof. P. Grierson, in which the allusive references were very ingeniously disentangled.

gaged in forging coins.[3] This was rough justice on secular men who blasphemed, as it were, against Caesar's image. Forgers of seals and documents were clerks, and so exempt from physical penalties; but there is no reason to think that most men consciously drew a distinction between one kind of forgery and another – save perhaps to observe that a royal or papal seal was an object of greater value and majesty than a mere penny. 'We know that the Church is the vessel of the fisherman who has no peer', wrote John of Salisbury, in the name of the Archbishop of Canterbury, about a generation later: 'we do not doubt that the Roman pontiff is the vicar of the chief among the Apostles: as the helmsman with his tiller guides the ship, so he by his seal's control guides the whole Church, corrects it and directs it. Thus the falsification of that seal is a peril to the universal Church, since by the marks of a single impress the mouths of all the pontiffs may be opened or closed, and all forms of guilt may pass unpunished, and innocence be condemned.'[4] And later in the century a Pope, who could not be unaware of what happened to his own seal, was constrained to observe of a clerk who had forged that of Philip Augustus that he should be unfrocked, degraded, branded, and exiled – but not mutilated, because he was a clerk.[5] Another of John of Salisbury's letters contains a *cri de cœur* to the Pope for a ruling on the punishment suitable for forgery, because cases were too common for the Archbishop to be able to ask for a judgement on every occasion. The subject of this letter was the son of a former Archdeacon of Llandaff, whose crimes were apparently numerous. 'To say nothing of carnal vice, we have heard from a multitude of persons that he is guilty of arson, robbery and all manner of crimes. With much zeal and effort, we have often re-established peace between him and his adversaries, but every time peace has come back from the encounter torn and sadly changed . . .'[6] His culminating depravity was revealed when he was charged with *lèse-majesté* for forging a papal bull – which the

[3] *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, E, *sub ann.* 1125.

[4] *Letters of John of Salisbury*, I, ed. W. J. Millor, H. E. Butler and C. N. L. Brooke (Nelson's Medieval Texts, 1955), p.109.

[5] Morey and Brooke, p. 130.

[6] *Letters of John of Salisbury*, I, pp. 97–8.

Archbishop confirmed was highly suspect for its peculiar style and erasures. There is a cloud of witness that forgery was regarded as a very heinous crime in the twelfth century.

None the less, it was also entirely respectable; and so common as to form an exceptional problem for historians of the centuries leading up to the twelfth, whose slender stock of documentary survivals was so considerably improved by the forgers. How and when it started, I know not; but its first great peak clearly came when the author of Pseudo-Isidore forged a large book full of papal letters in the interests, it seems, of an obscure episcopal quarrel now forgotten; and when a clerk of the Bishop of Le Mans forged another large book in an attempt to rewrite the feudal land law in the interest of the Bishop.[7] No one seriously surpassed these men in volume; but forgery was apparently at its most widespread, and a most characteristic part of the scene, in the first sixty years or so of the twelfth century. Then it rapidly declined into its normal place among human crimes.

These facts were already in some sense apparent to the scholars who laid the foundation of the critical study of medieval documents in the seventeenth century.[8] The eminent Bollandist, Father Papebroch, issued in 1675 a general warning against early charters, especially those produced by Benedictine monks, with a particular reference to the monks of St-Denis. His charges were not unfounded, but they were somewhat too sweeping; and the contemporary Benedictines looked round for a pamphleteer to defend them. The pamphlet that emerged was the *De Re Diplomatica*, a substantial folio, perhaps the most notable of all the great works of scholarship of Jean Mabillon, for in it he laid the scientific foundations for both palaeography and diplomatic. Only occasionally does it reveal its controversial origin. In the famous list of rules, which includes the fine principle that a document should be judged not by one but by every element and

[7] See W. Goffart, *The Le Mans Forgeries* (Cambridge, Mass., 1966), esp. chap. v, secs. 4, 5 (on this important study, see the interesting critique by J. van der Straeten in *Analecta Bollandiana*, LXXXV (1967), pp. 473–516). For current views on Pseudo-Isidore, see Goffart, pp. 66 ff.

[8] The story of the *De Re Diplomatica* is told (with full references) by D. Knowles in *The Historian and Character and other Essays* (Cambridge, 1963), pp. 221 ff.; the quotation at the end of this paragraph is on p. 223.

criterion possible – a principle as true now as in 1681 – there is a slight crack of the whip when Mabillon suggests that if forgery is a crime, then false accusations of forgery deserve their forfeit too.[9] But on the whole it was notably charitable as well as immensely learned, and Father Papebroch, perhaps the second most erudite scholar in Europe, after a long pause, wrote his celebrated letter of recantation. 'Count me as your friend, I beg of you. I am not a learned man, but I desire to be taught.'

Mabillon gave the study of documents a comprehensive frame of sensible rules, and established certain criteria of judgement; and the tradition of scholarship which he passed on to his disciples set the pattern for the study of medieval forgery for several generations. The problem was to distinguish the genuine from the false, and to avoid hypercritical judgement. Amid all the growing subtlety of nineteenth-century diplomatic, especially the new ideas fostered by the tradition of Sickel and Bresslau in Austria and Germany, this remained the central interest – the establishment of the genuine documents or the genuine element in interpolated documents. My own first steps in diplomatic were taken in the appendix on the forgeries of St Augustine's Canterbury attached to Wilhelm Levison's Ford Lectures.[10] For this reason, perhaps, I have always been more interested in the forger than in the forgery; and in a general way it can be said that the most notable advances in recent years in this field have lain in the investigation of forgery through the forger's eyes. We have long known that many documents cannot be placed in simple categories – genuine or spurious – that a great number fall into intermediate pigeon holes: badly copied, tendentiously copied, deliberately altered, improved, brought up to date – and so forth. Scholars have developed an elaborate casuistry to describe the numerous shades of grey into which documents fall. But until quite recently very

[9] *De Re Diplomatica* (Paris, 1681), pp. 241–2 (nos. iv, viii).
[10] *England and the Continent in the Eighth Century* (Oxford, 1946), Appendix I. The chief monuments to the work of Sickel are the *Institut für Österreichische Geschichtsforschung* and the volumes of *Diplomata* in the *Monumenta Germaniae Historica*; and of Bresslau the famous *Handbuch der Urkundenlehre* (3rd edn., 2 vols., 1958–60). A vital constituent in my own approach to all problems of diplomatic has been Professor Galbraith's emphasis, in all his writings on the subject, on the *human* context in which documents are framed.

little attention was paid to the forger, or the tendentious copyist, as a human animal. Now the wheel has turned, and we have had a number of studies in recent years from the forger's point of view, studies which ask, not 'Is this document genuine or forged?', but 'What has this document to tell us of the world in which it was born?' – and are prepared for that world to be a forger's world.

Papebroch, we have seen, submitted to Mabillon; but some of their disciples continued to dispute, and in the process one of the most remarkable contemporary documents in medieval forgery was bandied about and itself branded with infamy.[11] And so it was left to Levison to dig it out of oblivion. It is a copy of a letter from the Archbishop of Rouen to Pope Adrian IV which is preserved in the archives of Canterbury Cathedral. The Archbishop describes how he had been present in a papal council in 1131 when the Pope had asked the Abbots of Jumièges and St-Ouen at Rouen if they could establish their claims to exemption from episcopal control by authentic privileges. The Abbot of St-Ouen hesitated; then the Bishop of Châlons intervened and observed that when he had been Abbot of St-Medard at Soissons, 'one of his monks named Guerno in his last confession admitted that he had been a forger, and among other fictitious documents which he had written for various churches, he declared, with tears of repentance, that he had defended the church of St-Ouen and the church of St Augustine at Canterbury with spurious papal bulls; and that he had received some precious ornaments as the price of his wickedness and had taken them to the church of St-Medard'. And Levison proceeded, by subtle criticism of surviving bulls and early charters, to show Guerno's hand at work in the documents of St Augustine's, of St-Ouen, and St-Medard, and also of Peterborough Abbey; and observed that St-Medard was famous even in Guerno's own day for bogus relics.[12] In an ill-conceived article published in 1950–1, I myself attempted to add to Guerno's stock the famous Canterbury forgeries, on which the claim of the Archbishop to primacy of all England was first given its historical ground. For all but a fraction of the Cathedral's *spuria* this was

[11] For what follows, see Levison, pp. 206 ff.
[12] Levison, pp. 210–11; the letter is quoted on pp. 207–8.

demolished (urbanely, but conclusively) by Professor Southern
some years later; but a better success attached to a brief note at the
end of my article which suggested that Guerno had a worthy
successor in the mid twelfth century who worked for Westminster,
Ramsey, Bury, and St Peter's Ghent.[13] It had long been known
that Westminster had what James Tait called a 'factory of
forgeries',[14] which had somehow contributed to the work of other
houses, such as Coventry and Ramsey; my own point was that one
might well reckon it likely that it was a forger and not just forger-
ies which these other houses borrowed from Westminster. I based
this view on comparison of witness lists of impossible charters
attributed to William I. But I was quite unprepared for the extent
of evidence of this which has been unveiled in recent years by
Dr Chaplais and Mr Bishop.

Just after the end of the Second World War my father and I
visited Aberystwyth to look at the muniments of Hereford
Cathedral, then deposited in the National Library of Wales for
safe keeping. They include a group of charters from Gloucester
Abbey, among them a charter which had aroused suspicion, but
never been nailed a forgery, attributed to William the Conqueror.
This writ seemed to us to be in an eleventh-century hand, and the
seal, although repaired – so that certainty was impossible – to be
properly attached. There was some reason to doubt the grounds
on which it had been suspect, and I came away with the firm
impression that it was genuine.

In 1957 Dr Chaplais and Mr Bishop published their *Facsimiles of
English Royal Writs to A.D. 1100, presented to V. H. Galbraith.*
Hitherto it had been accepted doctrine that Edward the Confessor
had used three, and that William I and William II had each used
two, seal matrices. Bishop and Chaplais laid out a list of originals
of these three kings to which seals are still attached, dividing them
into writs otherwise supposed genuine and writs otherwise sup-
posed forged; and to the genuine one seal of each king, and to the
forged the other, is always attached. Evidence of handwriting

[13] *Downside Review*, LXVIII (1950), pp. 462 ff.; LXIX (1951), pp. 210 ff. – esp.
p. 230; R. W. Southern, *English Historical Review*, LXXIII (1958), pp. 193–226.

[14] J. Tait, in *Essays in History presented to R. L. Poole*, ed. H. W. C. Davis
(Oxford, 1927), p. 159 n.

confirmed in a number of cases that spurious originals for differ-
ent religious houses came from the same stable.[15] The enormous
bulk of the surviving work of this atelier is for Westminster Abbey,
and no one doubts that its headquarters lay there. If Guerno's
disciple who forged the Canterbury privileges gave the Arch-
bishop of Canterbury his primacy, Westminster Abbey owes its
unique privilege of being the site of the coronation of English
kings and queens first and foremost to the Westminster forgers.
The Gloucester writ can now be shown, both by hand and by
seal, to come from this workshop.

In 1962 Dr Chaplais carried his investigation a stage further, to
the point of identifying the Westminster forgers.[16] So greatly did
they increase the store of documents of their age that we can
never hope to be exactly sure how many were involved, still less
how much was known by how many folk about their work at the
time. But Dr Chaplais has isolated three men who were clearly at
the heart of it. First of all, he has identified the hand of one of the
scribes of the charters of Abbot Herbert of Westminster (who died
in or about 1136) as the scribe of the three great charters of
Edward the Confessor for Westminster; and another hand, which
wrote for Herbert's successor, Gervase, King Stephen's illegiti-
mate son, wrote writs attributed to the Confessor and the Con-
queror for Westminster and other houses, and a variety of other
documents; most oddly of all, he seems to have provided Abbot
Gervase with a spurious charter from his own father, King
Stephen. The writ of the Conqueror for Gloucester to which I
referred is in his hand. Chaplais has also shown, by a display of
verbal and stylistic parallels, that the more ambitious diplomas for
Westminster reveal the hand, or at least the mind, of the Prior of
Westminster, Osbert de Clare.

I must confess that when first I read the article, I found it hard
to believe that Osbert really composed forgeries; but the evidence

[15] *Facsimiles . . .*, ed. T. A. M. Bishop and P. Chaplais (Oxford, 1957), pp.
xix ff. Further evidence as to handwriting is given by P. Chaplais in *A
Medieval Miscellany for D. M. Stenton*, ed. P. M. Barnes and C. F. Slade (Pipe
Roll Soc., lxxvi, 1962), pp. 91 ff. For the Gloucester Abbey charter (now at
Hereford) see *Facsimiles*, p. xxi, no. xi, and p. xxii n.

[16] *Medieval Miscellany*, pp. 89–110.

is cogent, and in course of time I came to see that it was not only inescapable on textual grounds, but also not so improbable on human grounds as I had supposed.[17] Osbert was a dedicated man: his whole life was devoted to fostering the interests of his abbey, its patron saint, St Peter, and its most notable relic, the body of Edward the Confessor. He quarrelled with successive abbots because they were not sufficiently dedicated; he narrowly missed the abbacy, so far as we can tell, because he was too single-minded a man for an office so near the King and the Court. He was sent twice into exile for setting obedience to St Peter and St Edward before obedience to the Abbot and the King; he rewrote the earlier life of Edward the Confessor and supplied other communities with lives of their patron saints.

Although evidently allies, Osbert de Clare and the Abbot's clerks were men of different backgrounds and different skills. It is clear from Dr Chaplais's reconstruction that the clerks were professional scribes; and it is clear that they were professional forgers in a sense different from that which we could apply to Guerno or to Osbert de Clare. Fifty years later forgery was becoming less common; and yet still causing sufficient concern for Pope Innocent III, soon after his accession in 1198, to issue a bull giving a list of the techniques by which forgery could be perpetrated.[18] I have always been struck by the contrast between his list and earlier comments on the same problem. The letter of John of Salisbury speaks of errors of style, of erasures, and of spurious seals; and this is a characteristic statement for the early or mid twelfth century. Innocent was concerned above all with his seal: all but one of the list describe various dodges relating to the seal and the last alone refers to other methods of forgery. One technique described is to take a genuine bull, cut off the seal, and re-attach it to a spurious document. This involves cutting the strings and re-tying them in such a way as to hide the join; or else heating

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[17] Cf. Morey and Brooke, loc. cit., esp. pp. 139 ff.

[18] *Reg. Innoc. III,* ed. O. Hageneder and A. Haidacher, 1 (Graz-Köln, 1964), 520 ff. (lib. i, no. 349), cf. pp. 333 ff. (lib. i, no. 235); cf. R. L. Poole, *Lectures on the History of the Papal Chancery* . . . (Cambridge, 1915), pp. 152 ff.; C. R. and M. G. Cheney, *Letters of Pope Innocent III concerning England and Wales* (Oxford, 1967), pp. xxii f.

the top of the lead bulla or seal, inserting the strings coming from the new, bogus parchment, and then closing the top of the seal again with pincers. There are two bulls in the Public Record Office, almost exactly contemporary in date with Innocent's rules, purporting to grant indulgences in the interests of the nuns of the small priory of Wix in Essex, which exactly illustrate this method.[19] The seals are genuine; the parchments undoubtedly false. In one case it is just possible to detect, in the other quite impossible to detect, the marks of the pincers. These are the work of highly qualified professionals.

We know these two documents to be forgeries because of their handwriting. This is not a hand from the papal chancery, but it is one of the two hands which wrote many of the early charters of Wix priory, of which the P.R.O. still contains a substantial proportion. In some cases, these documents clearly hide legal chicanery: at least, the nuns were involved in tiresome and worrying lawsuits and some of the documents were probably altered to improve their case. Some again may replace charters defaced by damp, which the nuns in a mood of panic felt to be useless or inadequate. But in the main these two professional forgers seem simply to have rewritten the muniments, no doubt to increase their fee. Students of forgery always look for an immediate and powerful motive, no doubt rightly. But a comparatively modest difficulty can lead to a very extensive forgery, on the analogy of what Dickens said of the English law. 'The one great principle of the English law is, to make business for itself. There is no other principle distinctly, certainly, and consistently maintained through all its narrow turnings. Viewed by this light it becomes a coherent scheme, and not the monstrous maze the laity are apt to think it.'[20]

Such a story presupposes a situation something like this. The nuns of Wix were troubled by legal difficulties, and we may pre-

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[19] S.C. 7/9, nos. 2, 5, ed. W. Holtzmann, *Papsturkunden in England,* 1, 11 (Berlin, 1931), nos. 314, 329; cf. Brooke in *Medieval Miscellany for D. M. Stenton,* pp. 45 ff., esp. pp. 47–8, 57. I am much indebted to Dr P. M. Barnes, Mr L. C. Hector, and Mr H. C. Johnson, formerly Keeper of the Public Records, for help with these bulls. (S.C. 7/9, no. 2, and an enlargement of its seal, comprised plates 1, 11, of the original article.)

[20] *Bleak House,* chap. xxxix.

sume that being nuns they turned to their male legal advisers; or perhaps they knew enough of the world to know themselves that there were folk about who were expert in improving one's muniments. The two forgers were evidently given a free hand to sort and explore and tidy up. I am convinced the nuns knew that they were improvers, not just investigators; but I am equally convinced that they were given a free hand and that the nuns had no idea of the extent of their labours until they were presented with the bill.

Their productions make dull reading when compared with those of Osbert de Clare; and many would never have been suspect had they survived only in copies. This may start disquieting reflections in our minds. Mr Bishop has shown that of the 750 or so surviving original writs of Henry I, Stephen, and Henry II, a high proportion, perhaps as many as 300, are not the work of professional royal chancery scribes.[21] How many of these, we may ask, are the genuine products of casual scribes or of the beneficiaries, properly authorized? We may probably reckon a large majority authentic, and this seems to be Mr Bishop's view; and there are copious indications that forgery was in decline. But the Wix charters reveal just how difficult it is to be sure of the authenticity of twelfth-century documents. At one time it was fashionable to set up the authority of the authentic charter as objective and decisive and always to be preferred to the subjective, biased, imperfect view of the chronicler. Nowadays historians know nothing of infallible testimony; whatever our period, be it the third millennium B.C. or the twentieth century A.D., we handle evidence, and try to deduce from all the evidence we can muster what it has to tell.

Guerno, the Westminster forgers, and the Wix forgers reveal between them in what I believe to be a characteristic way both a shift and a decline: a shift from the monastic scriptorium to the professional atelier, and the decline of forgery as a respectable art.

The shift is part of the general trend away from the monastic scriptorium which is characteristic of the later stages of the

[21] *Scriptores Regis* (Oxford, 1961), esp. pp. 1, 3–4, 9, 14; on p. 11 he notes that about 450 are the work of royal scribes; on the origin of most of the rest he speaks with considerable caution.

twelfth-century renaissance. In the eleventh and twelfth centuries the monasteries were still sufficiently inspiring as leaders of fashion to attract a wide variety of talent, and craftsmen who were monks were still not rare. Outstanding examples of the early twelfth century were Roger of Helmarshausen, author of precious reliquaries of outstanding craftsmanship, and the anonymous monk who passed under the name Theophilus and wrote the Treatise on *The Various Arts*; it is indeed likely that Theophilus and Roger were one and the same man.[22] It is probable that the order best provided with craftsmen, anyway of the more practical arts, was the Cistercian, and that the presence of trained masons among the Cistercian lay brothers explains the extraordinary uniformity of plan and style, and the high standard of masonry, of twelfth-century Cistercian architecture.[23] After the twelfth century the Cistercians no longer attracted the same range of recruits; the leadership in talent passed elsewhere; and the decline of monastic craftsmen is doubtless at least one of the explanations of the disappearance, at the end of the twelfth century, of the

[22] Theophilus, *De diuersis Artibus*, ed. and trans. C. R. Dodwell (Nelson's Medieval Texts, 1961), pp. xl ff.

[23] The scanty direct evidence as to Cistercian master masons is laid out in M. Aubert, *L'architecture cistercienne en France* (2nd edn., Paris, 1947), I, pp. 97 ff. There is clear evidence that the Cistercians themselves played a conspicuous part in their own building enterprises in early days, and the uniformity of style and plan which they show over exceptionally wide areas makes it clear that there must have been skilled craftsmen within the order able to help direct the efforts of local builders; and this is confirmed by the uniformly high quality of Cistercian masonry. This is in marked contrast, for instance, to much Norman masonry in England of the two generations before the arrival of the Cistercians, whose poor quality presumably reflects in large measure an acute shortage of skilled masons due to the exceptional building effort of the Norman conquerors. The Cistercians were also involved in an exceptional building effort, but this led to no deterioration of standards; and this strongly suggests that they recruited skilled masons among their lay brothers, as they recruited other craftsmen of advanced skills – it is surely to such men, rather than to the eminent choir monks whom the documents name, that the Cistercians owed their style, and the recruitment of lay brothers in early days helps to explain over a wider front the comparatively advanced nature of Cistercian technological achievement. On the Cistercian style see F. Bucher in *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, III (1960–1), pp. 89–105, and works there cited.

Cistercian style as something separate from the other local styles of Europe.

Great traditions do not die overnight, and (to switch to a different field) some of the characteristics of late Anglo-Saxon drawing can still be seen in the thirteenth century in the artistry of Matthew Paris. But Matthew was an exception to prove the rule: in his chauvinist prejudices he was a man of the nineteenth century, which loved him; as monk, artist, historian, hagiographer, and forger he was a man of the twelfth century.[24] This particular combination was indeed a symbol of one aspect of the twelfth-century renaissance; and among many precursors of Matthew Paris let me choose a more attractive figure, from the early twelfth century: also a monk and calligrapher, historian and hagiographer – or biographer rather, for Eadmer's *Life of St Anselm* has been revealed to us in recent years by Professor Southern as the first and most effective intimate biography of its age.[25] His particular gift was to reveal personality in reported speech. From the fifth century B.C. to the eighteenth A.D. it was common form for historians to put speeches in their characters' mouths, to give variety and colour, to impart the character's thoughts (supposed or real), or the author's comments; and no one supposed that this was either to be taken literally or to be regarded as lying. There are indeed a number of cases in which the reported speech means more than this, and Eadmer's is clearly one. He had a sense, inspired no doubt by Anselm's particular gifts, that speech was the essence of his hero and the way to relate his views and personality; and we can see in the lesser characters, and especially in the *Historia Novorum*, a deliberate attempt to state their point of view in succinct but characteristic phrases: he seems to have taken particular delight in reproducing the staccato blasphemies of William Rufus. When Anselm rebuked the King for his treatment of the monasteries, Rufus made his famous retort: 'What business is that of yours? Are not the abbeys mine? You do as you like with your manors and shall not I do as I like with my abbeys?' Anselm replied, 'They are yours to defend and guard as their patron; but not

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[24] See R. Vaughan, *Matthew Paris* (Cambridge, 1959).
[25] R. W. Southern, *St Anselm and his Biographer* (Cambridge, 1963), esp. chap. IX; *Vita Anselmi*, ed. Southern (Nelson's Medieval Texts, 1962).

yours to assault or lay waste . . .'.[26] The doctrine and counter-doctrine of the Eigenkirche have never been more succinctly stated, not even by Ulrich Stütz himself. In this case one can see clearly enough that Eadmer is at work on a faithful portrayal of a scene; we have not sufficient ground to assume that these were the exact words used. In the account of the enquiries leading up to the marriage of Matilda and Henry I, he is very much concerned to defend Anselm's part in the affair; this leads him to claim objectivity: 'My conscience is my witness, I have described the order of events just as I saw and heard them, for I was present, giving favour neither to one side nor the other; and I have set out the maiden's actual words as spoken, not to assert whether they were true or false'.[27] Again, we may doubt whether Matilda's long speech is to be taken for *ipsissima verba*; but we may accept that Eadmer's statement was entirely reasonable in a world not used to precise reporting, in that he had made far more effort than was normal to be precise.

There is another interest in this passage: it is a curious way for a loyal subject to refer to a reigning queen. Clearly Eadmer was much more concerned with the monastic circle of his readers than with opinion in the royal Court. The early Archbishops of Canterbury were buried in St Augustine's Abbey; Eadmer was brought up with the bones of the later Archbishops, Dunstan and Ælfheah, and so his history of recent events starts with the age of Dunstan, and mostly consists of his own living saint, Anselm.[28] Dunstan, Ælfheah, and Anselm constitute for Eadmer the real world. Rufus, Henry I, and Matilda belong to the twilight of secular affairs. In this context we can understand the passage in which Eadmer introduced into his narrative the famous Canterbury forgeries. Under the year 1120 he wrote: 'In these days there arose a fervour of research into the authorities and ancient privileges of the primacy which the church of Canterbury claims over

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[26] *Historia Novorum*, ed. M. Rule (Rolls Series, 1884), pp. 49–50; trans. C. Bosanquet (London, 1964), pp. 50–1. On the Eigenkirche in England, see esp. F. Barlow, *The English Church, 1000–1066* (London, 1963), pp. 186 ff.
[27] Eadmer, ed. Rule, pp. 121 ff., esp. pp. 125–6; trans. Bosanquet, pp. 126 ff., esp. p. 131.
[28] On the relics of Canterbury Cathedral see Southern, pp. 260 ff.; below pp. 170–4.

the church of York.' The reason was the imminent failure of Canterbury's case, which had fallen into the hands of ignorant foreign bishops. Recent precedents were not enough; ancient authority was needed. 'And so many took pains in this investigation, as we have said, avowed the justice of God's Church, and with great care inspected the secret corners of ancient chests and holy gospel books hitherto serving solely as adornments to God's house. And lo! how the wish of the just man who loveth was not deprived of its reward: some privileges were found, firm in all points and supported by papal authority, by God's revelation.'[29] Hugh the Chanter of York refers to these 'bulls of privilege concerning the dignity and primacy of the church of Canterbury, which the monks had lately "found or thought up" ' – 'inuenerant uel cogitauerant' – and gives a lively account of the rough handling they received in the papal Curia; and more recently Professor Southern has observed that 'without a great deal of special pleading' one cannot acquit Eadmer 'from the charge of knowing that the privileges were forgeries and knowing that his account of their origin was false'.[30]

Historical truth is a fine thing; but if you live in a world in which Dunstan, Ælfheah, and Anselm preside every moment of the day and night over a tightly knit community, it may well seem a pious duty to extend the normal limits of historical description so that Truth in another sense shall not be denied in and to God's Church, Christ's own Church, Canterbury Cathedral. Many books could be written on the crimes inspired by loyalty; like all virtues it can lead us to heaven, but also direct to hell.

Such feelings were roused with equal fervour in defence of monastic properties or the properties of cathedral chapters; and in defence of monasteries which claimed exemption from episcopal control. Primacy and exemption demanded forgery: in the form in which they were claimed in the eleventh and twelfth centuries they were entirely new ideas, though their protagonists, for the most part, could not realize this. It was incomprehensible

[29] Eadmer, ed. Rule, pp. 260–1.
[30] Hugh the Chanter, ed. and trans. C. Johnson (Nelson's Medieval Texts, 1961), p. 105 (cf. pp. 114–15); Southern in *English Historical Review*, LXXIII (1958), pp. 225–6.

to them that earlier generations had not taken greater pains to preserve privileges they must have had. Similarly with land. In England the high watermark of forgery was the period between the new chaos of the Norman Conquest and the establishment of order, or growing legal precision, in the reign of Henry II.[31] By then forgery was more difficult, perhaps more dangerous; and in any case the forger had done his work. But it was a cosmopolitan world, and these are but the local expressions of movements which embraced much of western Christendom. Indeed, there had been forgery in England before the Conquest, and it may even be the accidents of survival which lead us to suppose the twelfth century to be its golden age. Yet there is clearly a sense in which the spread of literacy and of written instruments of land tenure made the eleventh and twelfth centuries, in a special sense, the period of the shift from oral to written testimony. The opportunities, the temptations, and the urgent calls of duty in such a period were quite exceptional. Osbert de Clare may well have known how diplomas were made in the eleventh century: it was apparently quite normal for the King to issue a writ telling a bishop to compose a diploma in his own or his community's interest.[32] This diploma would be embellished with signatures, but always made by the scribe not by the signatories; it had no seal. The Confessor must have intended the monks of his favourite monastery to have everything they wished; if his diplomas were defective or missing, this could only be attributed to criminal negligence. When Osbert died, he knew that he would tread a steep

[31] Morey and Brooke, pp. 128 ff.; it may be, as Dr N. P. Brooks has suggested to me, that this survey underestimates the quantity of English forgery before 1066.
[32] See F. E. Harmer, *Anglo-Saxon Writs* (Manchester, 1952), pp. 38–41 and nos. 7, 26, 55, 68; cf. Chaplais in *A Medieval Miscellany for D. M. Stenton*, p. 88. The peculiar difficulty of deciding what is 'authentic' and 'original' in pre-Conquest charters has long been recognized, but it has recently been placed on a new footing by Dr Chaplais's important articles 'The Origin and Authenticity of the Royal Anglo-Saxon Diploma' and 'Some Early Anglo-Saxon Diplomas on Single Sheets: Originals or Copies?', *Journal of the Soc. of Archivists*, III, no. 2 (1965), pp. 48–61; III, no. 7 (1968), pp. 315–36. Furthermore, the study of pre-Conquest charters has also been given a new foundation by Prof. P. Sawyer's *Anglo-Saxon Charters: an annotated List and Bibliography* (Royal Historical Soc., 1968).

and narrow path, and if he was fortunate come to the gate of heaven; and there he would be met by St Peter and St Edward, and we need not doubt that he was haunted by the questions they would ask. Yet I confess that it takes an effort of imagination to see into the mind of a man who prepares for his encounter with St Edward by planning the forgery of three or more charters in Edward's name each the size of a modest tablecloth.

Forgery in this age, then, illustrates a piquant episode in the history of loyalty; a key stage in the history of law; and reflects the inventive powers of the generations which created the twelfth-century renaissance. It was not confined to charters. The Book of Llandaff, whatever lay behind it, represented a bold attempt to bring the Welsh Church into the twelfth century and counter the effects and the chaos of the Norman Conquest of Glamorgan.[33] It consists of forged charters and saints' lives sometimes equally bogus; and it hints at the third type of forgery of the age. The greatest of the saints of Llandaff was St Teilo, and in the *Life of St Teilo* it is reported that an unseemly dispute over the relics led the saint, shortly after his death, to provide three copies of his own body.[34] The jewelled reliquary raised on a great shrine behind the high altar was the centre of the design of many of the greatest churches of the twelfth century; and in a certain number the completed shrine was a monument to fiction as well as to art. St Benedict lay at Fleury-sur-Loire; but it was inconceivable to the monks of Monte Cassino that he meant to. The monks of Ely blasphemously claimed that St Alban had gone to Ely in the Danish troubles and never returned; this his own monks at St Albans strenuously denied.

It may well seem to anyone who has studied the forgeries of Durham of the 1180s and of Wix of the 1190s, or of Lewes of the 1220s, or other smaller groups, that forgery was far from rare even after 1160. The difference is that down to the 1150s everyone

[33] Brooke in *Studies in the Early British Church,* ed. N. K. Chadwick (Cambridge, 1958), pp. 218 ff.; cf. *Celt and Saxon,* ed. N. K. Chadwick (Cambridge, 1963), pp. 312 n., 322 n. for criticisms of this paper, especially that by C. W. Lewis in *Morgannwg,* IV (1960), pp. 50–65 (see now the London Ph.D. thesis by Dr Wendy Davies).

[34] *The Text of the Book of Llan Dâv,* ed. J. G. Evans and J. Rhys (Oxford, 1893), pp. 116–17.

engaged in it. I exaggerate, of course; but not very much. Almost all the English monastic communities which claimed exemption from episcopal control forged to support their claims, and most can be shown to have forged in the early or mid twelfth century. In the past scholars have stressed – I have stressed myself – the legal changes of the century as explanation of the decline which set in thereafter; these, and the completion of the task, are undoubtedly important elements in the story.[35] But I am now inclined to place greater emphasis on the trend with which I opened: the shift from amateur to professional. So long as the work was done wholly within the monastic and other religious communities, the moral issue was one merely of conflicting loyalties: forgery was a crime when other types of folk engaged in it. But when the time came that if one wished to forge the procedure was to call in an outside professional, the case was somewhat different. I do not believe the risk of exposure much affected the issue. It would have been easier for Osbert de Clare to admit to forgery – and offer himself to martyrdom – than for the Wix forgers who were common criminals. No doubt euphemisms were in vogue, and it is disappointing that we do not know what they were. Guerno on his deathbed was a forger (*falsarius*); but to the monks of St Augustine's Canterbury or Peterborough he appeared, no doubt, as an expert archivist, or 'improver' of muniments. Osbert de Clare, Geoffrey of Monmouth, and Matthew Paris were historians. If the Wix forgers rewrote a large number of documents simply to increase their fee, Guerno and his like evidently rewrote large numbers too without altering their purport, to make them more impressive.

An older generation of scholars looked at forgeries mainly for the sake of the genuine element behind them; we now realize that this can only be considered if one studies first the men who wrote, rewrote, adapted, altered, or forged the documents as we now have them. I have recently been trying to reconstruct lists of

[35] Cf. Morey and Brooke, pp. 132 ff. On the Durham and Lewes forgeries, see G. V. Scammell, *Hugh du Puiset bishop of Durham* (Cambridge, 1956), Appendix IV; H. Mayr-Harting, *Acta of the Bishops of Chichester* (Cant. and York Soc., 1964), pp. 62–70. On forgery in the late Middle Ages, see L. C. Hector, *Palaeography and Medieval Forgery* (London and York, 1959).

tenth- and eleventh-century English abbots. Monastic communities had long and tenacious memories, and many left good annals behind which give us precise years of accession and death. But much of the material consists of the enormous lists of signatories to Old English diplomas. It is doubtful if any of these were drawn up in the assemblies which they describe, and no surviving pre-Conquest diploma has autograph signa. Every list depends therefore on its scribe's knowledge and accuracy, and it is perfectly possible that forgers sometimes worked off notes as reliable as authentic scribes; indeed, in this world the distinction between the genuine and the forged sometimes becomes as hazy as it was to Osbert de Clare and Eadmer.

Equally striking is the other reflection to which our picture of the mid-twelfth-century situation must compel us. The extraordinary thing is that many of these forgeries were produced in court at one time or another, and taken seriously. Some were clearly never intended to be used in this way. The monks of Gloucester got the Bishop of Worcester to send a covering letter to the Archbishop of Canterbury, in or about 1148, with a copy of a quite imaginary charter of the reigning king; this charter never existed, and details in the drafting of the copy which was made for the Archbishop reveal that it was intended merely to be a model for a genuine confirmation from the Archbishop. The pretended royal charter, and the Archbishop's well known admiration for and trust in the Abbot of Gloucester, Gilbert Foliot, made the conspiracy comparatively certain of success.[36]

Yet forgery was so widespread at this time that it must have been common knowledge that this sort of thing was happening, at least in certain circles. There is, I think, some evidence for this in the way in which it was parodied. In or about 1138 Geoffrey of Monmouth issued his *History of the Kings of Britain*; whatever else it was, it was a clever parody of genuine historical writing by a man who knew more than we do of the inward story of the Welsh forgeries of his age.[37] William of Malmesbury had written in the 1120s: 'Arthur is he of whom the Breton ditties still burble; but he was plainly worthy not to be dreamed of in bogus tales,

[36] See *Celt and Saxon*, pp. 272 ff., 279 ff.
[37] *Studies in the Early British Church*, pp. 205 ff.

but made the subject of true histories [*ueraces historiae*, an echo of a famous passage in Bede], as one who long upheld his falling land, and drove on to war the unbroken spirits of his fellow-countrymen'.[38] Geoffrey retorted by inventing a 'true history' of King Arthur, which is the centre-piece of his book; and by apostrophizing William in his epilogue. 'The kings . . . of the Saxons I leave to William of Malmesbury and Henry of Huntingdon: but I forbid them to say anything about the kings of the Britons, since they have not that book written in Breton which Walter archdeacon of Oxford brought out of Brittany; which is a true account of their history; and which I have thus in these princes' honour taken pains to translate into Latin.'[39]

Thus was born a convention which reappears in vernacular dress in countless romances of the late twelfth and thirteenth centuries. In its simplest form it is the convention that the romancer makes his story respectable by stating its source, or sometimes by simply disclaiming responsibility; thus Chrétien of Troyes lays the blame for his *Lancelot*, the most immoral of his works, on the Countess of Champagne. The only surprising thing is that some literary critics have believed him: surprising, because in the majority of cases the source is plainly fictitious; and it is evident that the convention, as it developed, depended on a fictitious contrast between the historical truth of the romance and an obviously imaginary or misleading origin. Thus a clear path leads from Geoffrey's Breton source, or his statement that the Laws of Malmutius had been written in the British tongue, translated into Latin by Gildas and into English by King Alfred and are still in force, to the claim of the author of the prose *Queste del Saint Graal* to have copied from a French translation of a Latin original made by Walter Map; or of Wolfram von Eschenbach in his *Parzival* to have corrected Chrétien out of a book by Kyot of Provence, who had it from the Arabic.[40] The conte was the work of a Cistercian

[38] *Gesta Regum*, ed. W. Stubbs (Rolls Series, 1887–9), I, 11.
[39] *Historia Regum Britanniae*, Epilogue (ed. A. Griscom, New York, 1929, p. 536).
[40] *Historia Regum Britanniae*, ii. 17, iii. 5, ed. Griscom, pp. 275, 282; for Map and Wolfram, see introd. to forthcoming revised edn. of Map's *De nugis curialium*, ed. and trans. M. R. James (Oxford Medieval Texts).

or his disciple; Wolfram was a semi-illiterate knight. We may doubt whether these characters knew at all precisely what it was to have lived in the world of Osbert de Clare. But they were heirs of the world of creative fancy in which Eadmer, monk and bishop-elect, and Geoffrey, secular canon and bishop, had lived and moved and had their being.

At the end of the day, as historians, we owe Geoffrey of Monmouth and Osbert de Clare some respect. They lacked the first, most vital quality of our calling: they played with truth. But they also played with techniques of research, not perhaps with the brilliance of William of Malmesbury or the author of the Book of Llandaff, but with a notable gusto. Geoffrey worked mainly in Oxford, Osbert in London, or rather in Westminster. Of Geoffrey it may be said that he founded the Oxford history school; and of Osbert (I hope) that he earned a passing thought in the Institute of Historical Research of the University of London.[41]

[41] See Origin of this essay.

6

Thomas Becket[1]

A revised version of a lecture given in Liverpool in December 1956.

ON the afternoon of Tuesday, 29 December 1170 (just over 800 years ago) four knights with their retinues visited the Archbishop of Canterbury at his palace near Canterbury Cathedral. About an hour later, when the Archbishop had gone to the Cathedral to hear vespers, the knights broke in after him, and assassinated him in

[1] The most recent interpretation of Becket is in David Knowles, *Thomas Becket* (London, 1970); see also his character studies in Knowles, *The Historian and Character and Other Essays* (Cambridge, 1963), chapter 6, and the centenary number (no. 65, 1970) of the *Canterbury Cathedral Chronicle*, which has a series of interesting papers by various authors. Knowles, *Thomas Becket*, pp. 172 ff., has a brief account of the lives etc., and a short bibliography; see also E. Walberg, *La tradition hagiographique de S. Thomas Becket* (Paris, 1929); on the letter collections, A. Morey and C. N. L. Brooke, *The Letters and Charters of Gilbert Foliot* (Cambridge, 1967); the indispensable corpus of sources remains the *Materials for the History of Thomas Becket*, ed. J. C. Robertson and J. B. Sheppard, 7 vols. (Rolls Series, London, 1875–85). For the circles in which Becket moved, see A. Saltman, *Theobald archbishop of Canterbury* (London, 1956); Knowles, *The Episcopal Colleagues of Archbishop Thomas Becket* (Cambridge, 1951); A. Morey, *Bartholomew of Exeter* (Cambridge, 1937); A. Morey and C. N. L. Brooke, *Gilbert Foliot and his Letters* (Cambridge, 1965); for the historical context, Z. N. Brooke, *The English Church and the Papacy from the Conquest to the reign of John* (Cambridge, 1931); C. R. Cheney, *From Becket to Langton* (Manchester, 1956); C. Duggan, *Twelfth Century Decretal Collections* (London, 1963).